

COMMUNICATION PROTOCOL

for Practicing with Conflicts and Disagreements

The following protocol, adapted from SFZC, has been developed to encourage members of the BZC community to take the initiative for informal, face-to-face communication when there is disagreement or conflict. It offers a respectful and considerate way to promote resolution and restore harmony in accord with our values and practices. This protocol is a work in progress; you are encouraged to take it up as a form for resolving conflict, and to make suggestions for changes and improvements.

If you have a conflict or concern you wish to address with a member of the community...

Preparation

1. Reflect on the potential benefits of having a conversation to address the issue or concern. There may also be potential drawbacks, or better ways to address the issue.
2. In preparing for the conversation, consider the other person's perspective; reflect on your own part in the conflict; and keep in mind that you don't know what you don't know.
3. Consider checking in with a trusted third party (e.g. a Sangha Harmony Ally, Guiding Teacher, or friend) who can serve as a confidential sounding board and provide impartial, compassionate feedback or guidance to you. In enlisting this person's support, be clear that you wish to avoid gossip or other divisive dynamics.
4. Respectfully request a conversation. Briefly state the issue and share your intention, if possible in terms of a shared value or goal, so the other person has a chance to reflect before the meeting. For example, "Could we meet to talk about _____ so we can continue to practice together better?"
5. Set a time and place, and decide if you would like a neutral third party to witness or facilitate.

The Conversation Itself

1. You may wish to begin by bowing, thanking the other person for agreeing to the conversation, acknowledging discomfort, or sitting quietly for a moment before beginning.
2. Share your intentions for meeting together.
3. Assume positive intent on the part of the other, and be curious and open. Be sensitive to cultural differences and different communication styles.
4. Share your view of the situation using "I" language, owning your own perspective and experience. Describe how the situation has affected you, emotionally and/or functionally. Make an effort to let go (or acknowledge the presence) of assumptions, interpretations, judgment, and blame.
5. Ask the other to share their perspective and experience. Listen carefully, and be prepared to work towards a mutually beneficial solution.

6. At the end of the meeting, check for mutual understanding, agree on next steps, and determine how and when you will follow up with each other. Decide together if the results of your discussion will affect others, and if so, what should be communicated to them (e.g., to inform others who are aware of the conflict that it has been resolved). Clarify whether the conversation will otherwise remain confidential.

If you are the receiver of a concern from another member of the community...

Preparing

1. Prepare by reviewing this communication protocol, and consider checking in with a trusted third party, as above.
2. Assume positive intent on the part of the person who has initiated the conversation. Think of it as a learning conversation, and cultivate an attitude of respect, curiosity, openness, and empathy.

The Conversation Itself

1. Listen without interrupting, except to ask brief clarifying questions. Notice any new information you have gained. Accept the person's narrative as something that is true for them.
2. Reflect back what you have heard, checking for accuracy and completeness.
3. Share your perspective on the situation and its impact on you. Be prepared to discuss possible solutions.
4. At the end of the meeting, check for mutual understanding. If necessary, agree on next steps and determine how you will follow up with each other. Decide whether the result of your discussion will affect others, and if so, what should be communicated to them. Clarify whether the conversation will otherwise remain confidential.

If both parties make a good faith effort to resolve the problem, but are unable to do so, options include (all with mutual agreement):

- Enlist the support of an impartial third party (e.g., someone trusted by both parties, Sangha Harmony Ally, Guiding Teacher).
- Take a break and return to the issue at a later date.
- Respectfully disagree, let it go, and move on.
- Raise the issue with a Sangha Harmony Ally if there are questions about policy or a request for no contact.

Reminders

- Conflict and disagreement are inevitable parts of human relationships. They are potentially very productive, and can help deepen our intimacy and appreciation of each other.
- Communicating in conflict is a practice, and it may take time to develop skills in this area. The more you practice, the easier it will become.